

Like a Rock

If Jesus is our supreme example of God's love and purity, surely the apostle Peter is our finest example of God's grace. In all of Scripture we have no closer kin. If Jesus represents what we should be, surely Peter represents what we really are.

In the way a problem child is very often a parent's favorite, Simon Peter may have been dearest to the Lord's heart. Jesus loved all of His disciples, certainly, and John reminds us that he was the disciple "whom Jesus loved." But just as a parent's heart will be softened toward the child that requires an extra helping of correction, guidance, or punishment, the heart of Jesus may have been especially close to Peter—His problem disciple.

What can we find of ourselves in Peter? What is there in his life that pushes us up toward holiness, without giving us license for our weakness? It's true that in Peter we see all our worst failings played out across the pages of Scripture: our pride, our boasting, our impetuosity, our quick temper and thickheadedness. Yet, in spite of these all too familiar character traits, Peter also displayed our more noble qualities of deep love and devotion to Christ.

It is easy to examine the life of Peter and discover the permission to fail, to let the flesh rationalize its dominance. He could be so foolish in his response to Jesus' tutelage—yet his Master loved him dearly. Surely, we say to ourselves whenever we fail, if Jesus could forgive *that*, he can forgive what *I've* just done. So we gain hope from Peter's life. We cling to his imperfections as "Get out of jail free" cards to use when we've done something stupid toward the Lord.

Peter was simply a man, and just as with any man or woman, we can choose to exemplify either their worst, or their better qualities. We can easily find in Peter the excuse to task God's grace. Or, if we so choose, in Peter we can find not our excuses, but our potential.

Once a rough-and-tumble fisherman, by the grace and unending patience of Jesus, Simon bar Jonah became "the Rock," upon whom Jesus would build His church on earth.

Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter). John 1:42

"And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." Matthew 16:18

Aspects

Encouraging believers to know God and His ways, and to enjoy a more intimate communion with Him

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The Beginnings of a Servant

It was time for bed. The fishermen were cleaning their equipment by morning light after a long, unfruitful night of work. Peter's eyes were tired from working in darkness by the light of dim lamps. His muscles ached from repeatedly letting down the long net stretched between boats, then drawing them back. He was frustrated and irritable from returning to shore empty-handed after so many long hours of hard work. All he and his partners wished to do was hang their nets to dry and forget their failure in slumber.

But the new teacher said to head back out and try again. Any number of human responses come to mind:

"What, are you *crazy*? There aren't any fish left out there!"

"You aren't a fisherman. You're a carpenter. And now you're telling us how to do our job?"

"We're beat right down to our socks. Come back tonight when we'll be fresh."

"Go peddle your papers, teacher."

Peter was perfectly capable of any one of these or similar responses. He was a tough, no-nonsense, frustrated fisherman who had just been up all night. Peter didn't even yet acknowledge the complete Lordship of Jesus—his "Master" was more a sign of respect for Jesus' wisdom and position of spiritual authority—but still, he obeyed.

Here is the beginning. Here is the glimmering spark of servant obedience. When the call makes no sense at all—when every particle of one's being cries out against the impractical command—we do it anyway.

Peter saw and heard something in Jesus. Weary from the all-night fishing, and washing his nets on the shore, he sat near Him and listened as Jesus spoke to the people, sharing His fresh perspective on God. Peter heard something in the Master's words that told him it was all right for a fisherman to put back out to sea on the word of a carpenter.

One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." Luke 5:1-5

O Lord, let me hear the same authority in Your voice. Let me listen attentively, hearing the same chords of heaven in the words You speak. With a true servant's heart, let me hear with clarity, understand perfectly, and obey without question.

Simon answered, "Master,
we've worked hard all night
and haven't caught anything.

But because you say so, I will
let down the nets."

When they had done so, they
caught such a large number of
fish that their nets began to
break. So they signaled their
partners in the other boat to
come and help them, and they
came and filled both boats so
full that they began to sink.

When Simon Peter saw this, he
fell at Jesus' knees and said,
"Go away from me, Lord; I am
a sinful man!" For he and all his
companions were astonished
at the catch of fish they had
taken, and so were James and
John, the sons of Zebedee,
Simon's partners.

Then Jesus said to
Simon, "Don't be
afraid; from now on
you will catch
men." So they
pulled their boats
up on shore, left everything
and followed him. Luke 5:5-11

Very God

There is peace in the presence of Jesus. There is certainly joy, happiness, the thrill of His personality, the buoyant exhilaration we experience at being so close to Him. The sensitive heart, however, is first—before any other pleasurable sensation—struck to the core by its own depravity.

When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"

Like the prophet Isaiah, when first confronted with the holiness of God we must drop to our knees and cry out "Woe is me, for I am ruined!" The only way to find joy with Jesus is to first realize our own sinful state in comparison to His purity.

Peter understood this. While the rest of his crew still gawked at the incredible haul of fish bursting their nets, Peter was suddenly overwhelmed by his close proximity to utter holiness, for surely only God could have caused such a miracle.

And here we see why Jesus loved him so. Peter could have turned to his mates and, in a clever way shouted, "Hey, look here! We've got God on board!" He could have been more devious, sidling up to his discovery and whispering, "I know who you are, but let's keep it *our* little secret." But instead, in honest humility, Peter realized that only holiness could have produced all those fish where only moments before there had been none. And in his sinful state, he wasn't worthy to be in the presence of one so holy.

As a result, Peter changed his earlier, generic "master" to the more accurate "Lord." The fisherman didn't have all the answers; he certainly didn't understand all there was about Jesus. But he did know one thing: The man standing before him was no run-of-the-mill teacher or rabbi, but very God. And faced with that—faced with Christ's inherent, radiant holiness—he could only fall prostrate before Him.

Holy Lord, be gracious to me, a sinner. Have mercy on one so unworthy in himself to stand in Your presence. But in Your presence let my sin be washed away by Your sacrificial blood, so that in Your grace I might rise to call You friend.

Inviting Him Inside

We walk the aisle or raise our hand with penitent head bowed. We make some public acknowledgment that we've confessed our sinful state and have accepted Christ. It seems safe enough; after all, we're only inviting Him into our heart—a comfortably vague concept. After that we make it a point to show up at the church every Sunday morning and maybe, just maybe, some other night during the week. After all, it's the least we can do. Yes, there He is; we've invited Christ into our heart.

It's quite another thing, however, to invite the Lord Christ into our home. This is where we live, where we eat and sleep, where we do all those things we'd rather keep hidden from the rest of civilized society. It's in our home that we can scratch where we like, put our feet on the coffee table, belch after a good meal. It's in our home that we lose our temper, and do other stupid things that others know nothing about. It's in our homes that all our secrets—whether benign or insidious—are hidden.

Peter, bless his heart, just couldn't get enough of Jesus. It wasn't enough for him to work with Jesus during the day, He wanted His Lord around all the time. Peter wanted Jesus there early in the morning when he rose from sleep. He wanted Him close by, leaning over the bubbling midday stew. And he wanted Jesus there to greet him after a hard day spent out on the boat. Peter wanted Jesus around his family, his neighbors, and he wanted Him sufficiently at-hand that he would never forget who it was he served.

Peter didn't think himself any more worthy than the rest in having Jesus in his home. He just loved his Lord so much that he was willing to risk Jesus seeing him at less than his best. He was willing to be vulnerable, to permit Jesus access into the deepest recesses of his personal life.

As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told Jesus about her. So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.

Mark 1:29-31

O Lord, let me never be satisfied with being simply acquainted with You. Instead, let my passions for You soar, to throw wide the shutters and doors of my life, to dwell intimately, deeply, with You as a person and friend.

*Thou didst leave Thy throne and Thy kingly crown
When Thou camest to earth for me;
But in Bethlehem's home was there found no room
For Thy holy nativity:*

*O come to my heart, Lord Jesus!
There is room in my heart for Thee.*

*Heaven's arches rang when the angels sang,
Proclaiming Thy royal degree;
But in lowly birth didst Thou come to earth,
And in great humility:*

*Thou camest, O Lord, with the living Word
That should set Thy people free;
But with mocking scorn, and with crown of thorn,
They bore Thee to Calvary:*

*When the heavens shall ring, and the angels sing,
At Thy coming to victory,
Let Thy voice call me home saying, "Yet there is room,
There is room at My side for thee:"*

*My heart shall rejoice, Lord Jesus!
When Thou comest and callest for me.*

Emily E.S. Elliott

During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

"Come," he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him.

"You of little faith," he said,

"why did you doubt?"

Matthew 14:25-31

A Trusting Gaze

Peter looked at Jesus and was able to walk on water, but when he looked at the wind instead, he began to sink.

As a director of Christian drama—much of which is performed by devoted, but inexperienced amateurs—I've always made the point with my actors: If you're supposed to be looking at another character on stage, you have to really *look* at them—really look into their eyes. It makes a difference. If your gaze is even slightly averted, even with the audience far away, they can tell, and the scene won't ring true.

Watch actors on TV, or in movies. If they're faking it—if they are reading their lines off a card over the shoulder of the other person in the scene—you won't believe a word they say. They will never be believable if they aren't making true contact with the other character.

And that's what happened to Peter. He was accomplishing the miraculous—actually walking on water, just like Jesus. But then he took his gaze off the Lord and he began to sink. It just didn't work. He couldn't do it on his own.

It wasn't his bravery that was keeping Peter atop the water—it was his trust in Jesus Christ. With that trust and dependency he could accomplish the miraculous. Without it, he was just another fisherman with lead feet.

*O soul, are you weary and troubled?
No light in the darkness you see?
There's light for a look at the Saviour,
And life more abundant and free!*

*Thro' death into life everlasting
He passed, and we follow Him there;
Over us sin no more hath dominion—
For more than conqu'rors we are!*

*His word shall not fail you—
He promised;
Believe Him, and all will be well:
Then go to a world that is dying,
His perfect salvation to tell!*

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face;
And the things of earth
will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace.
Helen H. Lemmel*

Lord Jesus, I want to forever keep my gaze upon Your beautiful face, looking deeply into Your eyes. Let others be distracted by the frightful wiles and enticements of the world. I will happily look instead to You as my Light, my Guardian—my hope.

Intentions of the Heart

Some people look at the actions of King David—a man of war and bloodshed, of adultery and murder—and wonder how it is God could have declared him a “man after His own heart.”

...and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, “Isn’t this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?” Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (She had purified herself from her uncleanness.) Then she went back home. The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, “I am pregnant.”

...In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. In it he wrote, “Put Uriah in the front line where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die.”
2 Samuel 11:3-5, 14-15

And people look at the mistakes the apostle Peter made—his clumsy misunderstandings, his intemperate words and behavior, his cowardly denial of Jesus—and wonder how he could have been one of the Lord’s most important disciples and leaders in His church.

And the servant girl saw him again, and began to say to those who stood by, “This is one of them.” But he denied it again. And a little later those who stood by said to Peter again, “Surely you are one of them; for you are a Galilean, and your speech shows it.” Then he began to curse and swear, “I do not know this Man of whom you speak!”
Mark 14:69-71 nkjv

But Jesus isn’t surprised by our humanity. He isn’t disappointed that we fail in our efforts to be perfect like Him. Jesus doesn’t need us to be perfect; He needs us to love Him, and to declare Him Lord of our lives.

It was Peter’s shining moment, and one that defined the intentions of his heart. Peter wasn’t perfect. He knew it, and Jesus knew it. But when the question was posed: “Who do you say I am?” the burly fisherman with the stink of the sea on him stepped forward and declared flat out: “You are the one we’ve been waiting for. You’re not just a good man. You’re not just a teacher—but God. You are *the Christ!*”

“The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” 1 Samuel 16:7b

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Matthew 16:13-16

Jesus, my Lord, may I cease striving toward perfection, and find my perfection only in You. Judge me not by my clumsy actions, but by the deep love I have for You in my heart. Hear my heart’s joyous song of praise, and know that it is true, my Lord and King.

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there... John 20:1-6

Learning the Truth

What's going on here?" is a phrase not often heard these days. We have become a society of spoon-fed isolationists who don't really care what's going on outside our own, insulated sphere of comfort. Is there injustice being done to a neighbor? "Hey, am I my brother's keeper?" we plead in defense of our inaction. Is there corruption and treason being perpetrated in the highest offices of the land? "Well, that's their own business. It has nothing to do with me" is the excuse for our apathy.

Sadly, this has also become the mark of our Spiritual life. Does the Sunday School lesson square with Scripture? "Oh, I'm sure it does. After all, he's been a Deacon for twenty years." Does something said in the sermon sound inaccurate? "Well, he knows a lot more of the Bible than I. He must know best. After all, he went to seminary."

The less we know the truth about others, the easier it is to deny the truth about ourselves. The inadequacies in others can too often become an uncomfortable reflection of our own. So we pass off those troubling questions and move on with our comfortably small lives. None of our business. We'd rather not know.

Peter and John came to the tomb together. John hesitated at the entrance, but Peter barged right in. "What's going on here?" Peter wasn't afraid to learn the truth—and he wanted to know. What would he find? a corpse? an angel? a living Jesus? an empty shroud? He could handle it, whatever the truth might be. And he wanted to know for himself.

Lord, because You have nothing to hide, I pray for the determination to seek out all of Your truth. Let me listen and learn from Your teachers, but let me also never depend wholly on a gospel described by others. Your word is my lamp; may it never be extinguished by my indifference.

Aspects

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To Contact Us

Phone: 515-462-1971.

Postal address: 2444 195th Trail, Winterset, IA 50273-8172.

Internet address: dlampel@aol.com

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